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ABSTRACT

This brief paper describes the Circle of Collaboration approach at one elementary school in Utah that is focusing on development of an inclusive school for all students and implementation of a program (Balance Literacy) to enhance students' reading skills. Balance Literacy incorporates phonemic awareness, phonic instruction, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension instruction. The collaborative process is directed by the Diversity Team comprised of a school administrator, a teacher representative from each grade, school specialists, and the literacy curriculum facilitator. Team efforts have included organization of collaboration time for teachers, literacy block scheduling, and alignment of curriculum and assessment. A Literacy Curriculum Team has collaborated in efforts such as school-wide comprehensive professional development, paraprofessional training, and establishment of a model classroom. The Circle of Collaboration approach has led to greater grade level collaboration, specialist collaboration, and school teams collaboration. The paper concludes that the Circle of Collaboration approach has brought unity to the school, a unified curriculum, unified expectations, and unified effort. (DB)

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The Circle of Collaboration

INTRODUCTION

Heber Valley Elementary is the largest of the three elementary schools in the Wasatch County School District. The Heber Valley community is changing from an agricultural one to more of a bedroom community for Salt Lake and Utah Counties. The community is also becoming more culturally and ethnically diverse. As a result, Heber Valley Elementary has made a number of changes to support the education of students.

Our Mission at Heber Valley Elementary is to guide all students in the achievement of their individual highest potential, by providing guided and adapted instruction within the regular education classroom through a collaboration of resources.

Two movements at Heber Valley specifically support this mission statement. The first involves a move to develop an inclusive school for all students. The second is the implementation of Balance Literacy Practices to enhance the reading skills of students. A number of structures and procedures developed to support these two movements will be presented in this paper.

MOVEMENTS

The National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (NCERI) definition of an inclusive school is, "Providing to all students equitable opportunities to receive effective educational services, with the needed supplementary aids and support services, in age-appropriate classes in their neighborhood schools, in order to prepare students for productive lives as full members of society." For the past five years our Diversity Team has been working to achieve this goal in partnership with the University of Utah's School and Community Inclusion Project.

With schools moving toward a more inclusive environment, a growing need has arisen to identify instructional techniques that enable all students to be educated successfully together. Balance Literacy incorporates phonemic awareness, phonic instruction; fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension instruction to help children successfully learn to read. It is an important component in the strategies to help children succeed at Heber Valley Elementary. Bringing Inclusion and Balance Literacy together supports a clear vision to see all students succeed at their highest potential.

CIRCLE OF COLLABORATION

Diversity Team

The Diversity Team serves to direct the collaborative process. The Diversity Team is made up of a school administrator, a teacher representative from each grade level (6 teachers), school specialists from Special Education (4 teachers), Title 1 (1 teacher), and our Literacy Curriculum Facilitator. The Diversity Team meets on the 2nd Wednesday of every month and is facilitated by an elected teacher. A needs assessment is given each year and is used to help guide the direction of the team. The following are some examples of team efforts:

- Early Out- An early assessment showed that our teachers needed more time for collaboration. After reviewing plans from other districts the Diversity Team proposed an early-out day. Fifteen minutes would be added on to Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday's school schedule, giving one hour of time that could be taken off the Wednesday school schedule. This created an early out day for students and a solid collaboration time for teachers. After five year, Heber Valley is still the only school in the district that uses this approach for more collaboration time.
- Literacy Block Scheduling- With all At-risk students in the regular classroom and with the implementation of Balance Literacy, teachers needed large blocks of morning time to teach literacy and receive the needed support at the same time. After modifying the schedule over the years, each

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teacher is currently receiving 1.5 hours of support from a Para-professional (funded through Sp.ed, Title 1 or ELL), and ½ hour support from a Specialist (certified teacher from Sp.ed., Title 1, or Ell), for a total of 2 hours of special support per day. The teachers have the flexibility to schedule their literacy blocks during prime learning time and receive the "needed supplementary aids and support services".

- Curriculum Alignment and Assessment- With all At-risk students being served in the regular education classrooms, curriculum concerns became evident. Using the curriculum alignment model, each grade level team began aligning core standards to essential skills. This is an on-going process that allows teachers to become familiar with the core standards that are a high priority for their students. An assessment has been written by the grade level teams to help monitor students progress.

Literacy Curriculum Team

The Literacy Curriculum Team consists of our literacy Curriculum Facilitator, the school administrator, a teacher representative from each grade level (6 teachers), one Special Education teacher, and one Title 1 teacher. The Literacy Curriculum Team meets twice a month and is facilitated by the Literacy Curriculum Director. To help direct the implementation of Balance Literacy, a survey is given out to the teachers at the end of each school year.

The following are some examples of how our collaborative efforts brought needed change:

- Teacher on Special Assignment- To unite the school into one continuum of instruction a proposal was made to Wasatch County School District to provide Heber Valley Elementary with a Teacher on Special Assignment. This teacher would be released from their regular teaching duties to be the school Literacy Curriculum facilitator.
- School-wide Comprehensive Professional Development Plan-Under the direction of the school Literacy Facilitator and curriculum team, monthly workshops and observational opportunities have been planned. Teachers have the flexibility to choose the workshops that would best assist them in implementing or improving their teaching skills in Balance Literacy. A focus has been set in Guided Reading, Writer's Workshop, and Reading Strategies and Comprehension.
- Para-professional Training- The Literacy Curriculum Facilitator, teachers from Special Ed., ELL, and Title 1 provide bi-monthly training for the Para-professional. The same Balanced Literacy strategies are taught, with emphasis on how our Para's can assist teachers and ensure all At-risk students are being reached.
- Model Classroom- A model classroom that has all of the components of an Inclusive Balanced Literacy program has been established for observational opportunities. This allows teachers to observe good teaching practices without leaving the school for professional development.

Collaboration

Our "Circle of Collaborations" is constantly changing and growing. With this change and growth a sense of ownership has been built among our faculty. This ownership has empowered our teachers to take an active role in our collaboration efforts, initiating more success and change. The following are some of the things that happen during early out time.

- Grade Level Collaboration- Teachers have quality time to discuss At-risk students, prepare and adapt lessons, share ideas, and meet with specialists. The second grade team always ends their collaborations time with a "teacher share". Each team member brings a center idea, worksheet, teaching strategy, book or adaptations that were successfully used in their classroom. The fourth grade team is a holding a "Book Club" once a month. Each moth they read a chapter from a professional book and discuss the contents of that chapter.
- Specialist Collaboration- Teachers from Special Education, Title 1, ELL, and the Literacy Curriculum Facilitator meet every week to discuss student services, student monitoring, programs, schedules, Para-professional training, teacher support, or curriculum concerns. With the blending of Special Education, Title 1 and ELL services this collaboration time is very important to us. To keep the communication lines between teacher and specialist open, each specialist is part of a grade level team. We monitor the grade level At-risk students, provide service, set up programs, make adaptations and attend grade level team meetings.
- School Teams Collaboration- In the beginning the Diversity Team and the Literacy Curriculum Team were the only school teams that met during our early out day. As new concerns were discussed in these

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meetings other school teams were established. Discipline team was established to direct in a school-wide discipline program. Following the "Cool Kids" skill building method, developed by Susan Fister. We also have a skill building room for students that need extra help learning the "Cool Kids" procedures and skills. The A.I.M.'s team was established to help teachers with Adaptations Interventions, and Modifications for students' of co.icern.

Additional Activities

Other activities that have empowered teachers and developed a professional relationship among our staff members are:

- With Regular Education teachers now having support during the Literacy Block they are getting the most out of the curriculum. A united effort is underway as the teacher, the Para-professional, and the specialist join forces in teaching students.
- Teachers are going through the process of aligning the curriculum; teachers have solid knowledge of the core standards. With this knowledge and using the core testing results, teachers are directing their teaching to the strengths and weaknesses of their class.
- The Professional Development is based on the needs of the teachers. They have the flexibility to choose what they need to implement the Balance Literacy concepts in their classroom.
- The Para-professionals are receiving extensive training. Each Para works with 2 teachers in the same grade level. Depending on the needs of the grades and the Para's, training is provided accordingly. They have been trained in Balance Literacy, guided reading, Cool Kids, running records, I Can Read, sequential phonics and much, much more. With these skills they are an essential component to our teacher' classrooms.
- Each teacher has observational time during the school year if they would like it. Grade level teams go and observe various programs at work. When they return to school they debrief and take ideas back into their classrooms. Our Literacy Curriculum Facilitator is also available to go into classrooms and model a variety of strategies and concepts.

Our "Circle of Collaboration" has become UNIFIED as we empower ourselves to control our own destination.

UNITY

UNITY that is what our "Circle of Collaboration" has brought to Heber Valley. Unified in curriculum. Unified in expectations. Unified in effort. We have many success stories that have affected positive change and development in our school. Some of the positive changes and developments are:

- All Special Educations students are attending their neighborhood schools.
- 90% of our teachers have implemented guided reading in their classrooms.
- Students are involved in helping each other achieve goals through peer tutoring and cross age tutoring.
- IEP goals are being met in the regular education classrooms
- Para-professionals share a common office space.
- An extensive Guided Reading Library has been established. We have over 1.000 titles that vary from A to U. It is centrally located for easy access. Within this library we also have materials available for teachers use. Magnetic letters, magna doodles, white boards, phonic lessons, wikki sticks and tests are a few items that can be used by all.
- A one on one reading room was created for our volunteers to work with our students.
- A Parent Resource area has been added to our school library. This area has books, tapes, homework ideas, and parent tips available for checkout.
- A Math Curriculum Library has been started, but is not completed. Teachers come to the library and check out manipulative, books, games, math adaptations, etc.
- Power Hour, an early morning reading program has been provided for targeted students that are at-risk. We have 30 students attend Power Hour every day. The specialists provide this additional service along with two Para-professionals.
- With the "I Can Read" volunteer reading program, our parent volunteer hours have increased.
- Our PTA has donated money to our Guided Reading Library and to individual classroom libraries.

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- A free after school program has been set up for students. The classes that are offered presently are: pottery, looming, Spanish and upper level math problems. This was set up by teachers for students who wanted to excel or be challenged by something a bit different.
- A "Celebrate Our Success" bulletin board in our faculty encourages teachers and staff to write compliments to each other and post them on the board. A small token of appreciation is given with each compliment.

Changes to the community in the Heber Valley necessitated changes in the educational programming at Heber Valley Elementary. The changes required to meet the vision of educating all students was facilitated by a "Circle of Collaboration." The circle involves Balance Literacy Programs, Diversity Teams, Grade Level Teams, Specialists Teams and others. It also involves changing the educational structures, an early out time, literacy scheduling, power hour and Para-professional training were just some of the needed pieces. The changes mentioned above bring about many new ideas and possibilities each of which can add to our "Circle of Collaboration".

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